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ABSTRACT

A survey questionnaire, designed to explore the extent of job dissatisfaction among female elementary school teachers, elicited responses from 255 subjects with varying demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds from different parts of the country. Questionnaire items focused upon: (1) personal background; (2) job expectations; (3) satisfaction; (4) perception of working conditions; (5) perception of career importance and options; and (6) rechoice of teaching as a career. Nearly 40 percent of the women indicated they would not again choose elementary teaching as a career. Two factors were identified as underlying themes related to teacher job dissatisfaction: working conditions, and perceptions of women's roles in professions. Some of the most frequent additional teacher comments concerned poor working conditions, the increase of paperwork, the declining status of teachers, and the availability of other job options. This study led to the development of the Teacher Stress Scale (TSS), an instrument designed to identify factors of teacher stress and job dissatisfaction. A description is given of the nine factors of teacher stress and job dissatisfaction measured by the TSS. Recommendations are offered to improve the teaching workplace and teaching as a profession. (JD)

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Educators in Crisis:

The Need to Improve the Teaching Workplace

and Teaching as a Profession

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Educators in Crisis: The Need To Improve the Teaching Workplace and Teaching as a Profession

Teacher stress and burnout are words heard almost daily in schools and in the media. Statements like the following are not uncommon:

> I became a teacher because I really care about kids, but now the kids are what I have least time for...reports and paperwork take most of my time and energy.
>
> I'm tired of working hard at a job no one respects...society, parents don't support us like they should.

Recent reports, such as that of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, with its conclusion about "the rising tide of mediocrity" in our schools have not only highlighted national concern regarding the state of education in our country but have also increased the stress felt by many teachers.

We are facing a critical situation in the field of education. Education and educators are currently held in low public esteem, and dissatisfaction and stress among educators is clearly being documented.

A 1981 survey by the NEA (Status of the American Public School Teacher, 1980-81) found that 36 per cent of U.S. teachers would not choose teaching again as a career, and only 22 per cent would definitely choose teaching again. A recent survey of public school teachers in New York State conducted by The New York Times (Fiske, 1982) stated that 47 per cent of the respondents would go into another profession if they could do it all over again.

We are also hearing troubling reports on the quality of prosepective teachers. The average SAT verbal score for education majors has dropped 79 points in eight years (Siev, 1982). Teaching not only is failing to attract the most capable students but is attracting a "disproportionate share of the least able" students (Vance and Schechtly, 1982).

It is interesting to note that, for the first time, the 1982 Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools included a section on teacher burnout. The Poll asked the public to select reasons for teacher burnout. Discipline problems, low teacher salaries, unmotivated students, and lack of parent support were perceived by the general public as reasons for burnout and the frequently resulting decision of teachers to leave teaching (Gallup, 1982).

Teacher stress is not a simple issue. We, as educators, are dealing with complex human and social problems--problems that often reach far beyond the school itself. There is frequently no clearcut answer to the problems we are faced with and, in addition, we are often not in control of such problems or their solutions.

If we are to continue to attract and retain competent teachers, it would seem helpful to identify factors of teacher stress and job dissatisfaction in order to develop programs and policies to help reduce such stress and dissatisfaction.

In order to do so, we began by examining perceptions of job satisfaction among female elementary teachers (Wangberg, Metzger and Levitov, 1982). It is widely accepted that the shifting roles of women in our present society are presenting us with profound societal changes, the implications of which are only beginning to be fully recognized. Not only has there been an increase in the number of women working outside the home, but the job options available to these

women have also increased. Such changes offer a serious warning to the education profession. The field of education is particularly vulnerable to such trends since the majority of teachers, particularly in the elementary schools, are women. It has been reported that "women, who have traditionally made up most of the teaching work force, are being attracted into private industry, and the percentage of college freshmen and women expressing and interest in teaching has plummeted since the 1960's" (Education USA, 1980).

Despite this evidence, we in education have been lulled into complacency by our own unique history. In the past, when a woman ventured from home to pursue a "profession," she had two options--teaching or nursing. Consequently, education and nursing have benefited from a seemingly unending and unlimited supply of talented and dedicated female employees. It is such traditional occupational female decisions that are being influenced by a growing awareness of expanding personal and professional options. Today female teachers, not unlike their working sisters, are questioning their occupations within the larger context of changing contemporary working expectations (Lebowitz, 1980).

What real effect do these increased options have on both prospective and experienced female teachers? What impact will increased options have on our elementary schools? What should we do to continue to attract talented females to elementary teaching and to further their job satisfaction within the teaching profession?

We attempted to find some answers through a study to help to determine the extent of female elementary teacher job dissatisfaction and to begin to investigate the factors related to this dissatisfaction.

Method

A random sample of 20 per cent of the female regular elementary classroom teachers was drawn from four school systems representing varying national

demographic, socio-economic, and geographical characteristics. The sample included teachers from a large urban southern system, a rural midwestern system, and two suburban western systems. Sixty-five per cent of the sampled teachers responded, providing 255 subjects for the study.

Data were collected through the use of a teacher questionnaire. Two questionnaire items focused on personal background. Ten Likert scale items were used; eight of these items measured teacher job expectations, satisfactions, and perceptions of working conditions, while the other two items measured perception of career importance and career options for women. A concluding question focused on rechoice of teaching as a career. The questionnaire also provided subjects with the opportunity to add personal comments.

Results

Nearly 40 per cent of the women in this study indicated that if they could rechoose their career, they would not again choose elementary teaching. This result should warrant serious concern in our profession. A factor analysis was subsequently conducted in order to determine the underlying themes related to teacher job dissatisfaction. Two factors were identified: the first factor involved working conditions, and the second factor involved perceptions of women's roles in professions.

On a less formal level, we were surprised to discover that 40 per cent of the responding teachers took time to add comments ranging from several sentences to several pages in length. We found this significant in that it reflected teachers' acute concern regarding job satisfaction. Although a few comments reflected satisfaction, the majority reflected discontent and ranged in emotion from simple complaints to grave dissatisfaction. Some of the most frequent comments concerned poor working conditions, the increase of paperwork, the declining status of teachers, and the availability of other job options.

Our findings suggest that female elementary school teachers are currently experiencing a significant amount of job dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction appears to be a function of working conditions as well as general perceptions of career options. Furthermore, teacher dissatisfaction cannot be explained by years of teaching experience. This finding is important because it indicates that attitudes toward teaching and toward female career options appear to have changed for more experienced as well as for less experienced teachers.

It is interesting to note that teachers in this study rated "having a career" as highly important to their identities. Lortie's national findings (1975) indicate teachers are highly intrinsically job motivated, gaining their greatest satisfaction from positive contacts with students. What may be happening in part is a decrease in the number of positive student contacts due to outside federal, societal and administrative demands. These demands may be leading to less desirable working conditions for teachers and this, in turn, may increase the appeal of other job options. Cherniss (1978) has found prolonged job stress and consequent job dissatisfaction to be related to negative work attitudes and behavior. When teaching allows less positive interaction with students, the job may become less satisfying, and the quality of teaching may suffer.

We can conclude that in the light of increased career options for women, there is a need to improve the professional and working conditions of teaching. Despite the fact that economically depressed areas of the country are currently facing severe cutbacks, including teacher layoffs, a vital concern remains--the quality of teachers.

The study just described led to the development of the Teacher Stress Scale,[c] an instrument to identify factors of teacher stress and job dissatisfaction (Wangberg and Levitov, 1983). The Teacher Stress Scale was administered to a random sample

[c] The Teacher Stress Scale (TSS) is copywritten, Elaine G. Wangberg, 1983.

of ten per cent of K-12 teachers in a large urban system. Three hundred ninety-seven subjects participated. The Teacher Stress Scale (TSS) contains 75 Likert scale items, with responses ranging across a seven-point scale. Each item focuses on a problem area from the literature on teacher stress and job dissatisfaction.

After analyzing the data, we identified the nine factors of teacher stress and job dissatisfaction, described below.

1. Burnout, dissatisfaction. Descriptors: negative feelings about work, negative feelings about own competence, lack of administrative support, loss of decision making for own classroom, care less about students, less time for positive interactions with students, negative feelings about teaching as a career. Possible contributors: societal, institutional and personal.

2. Environment. Descriptors: unpleasant work environment, rundown building, noise, inadequate materials, violence, extremely hot or cold temperatures. Possible contributors: societal, institutional.

3. Work rewards. Descriptors: lack of public and parent support and respect, poor benefits and salary, lack of individual recognition, low job mobility, low job status. Possible contributors: societal, institutional.

4. "Caretaker" personality. Descriptors: avoid expressing feelings, focus on failures, can't say "no", feel selfish if take time for self, feel inadequate compared to other teachers. Possible contributors: societal, institutional.

5. "Other" control. Descriptors: little control over what teach, little control over how teach, little participation in decision making. Possible contributors: societal, institutional.

6. Physical symptoms. Descriptors: headaches, neckaches, backaches, taking more drugs, taking more sick days, severe physical problems. Possible contributors: institutional, personal.

7. Overload. Descriptors: Too much to do, paperwork, workload has negative effect on interactions with students. Possible contributors: institutional, personal.

8. Perfection. Descriptors: 100% standards for success, feel upset when not a perfect teacher. Possible contributors: institutional, personal.

9. Health habits. Descriptors: non-nutritional diet, smoking more, eating more, drinking more, too little exercise. Possible contributors: personal.

When elementary and secondary teachers were compared on the above factors, results showed that elementary and secondary school teachers perceive certain identified stress areas differently. For example, elementary teachers perceived less stress in their overall teaching environment than did their secondary school counterparts. Also, elementary teachers perceived significantly more stress concerning workload than did secondary teachers, while teacher burnout was more a problem for secondary teachers than for elementary teachers. Stress resulting from "other control" was greater for elementary than for secondary school teachers. No differences between the two groups were found when the factors identified as "work rewards", "caretaker personality", "physical symptoms", "perfection" and "health habits" were analyzed.

The TSS was then used to identify stress factors and the level of stress within a double shift high school at the request of its faculty. No significant variance from the means of the local system was found. Somewhat surprisingly, it did not seem that the double shift increased stress in this school. Interviews with teachers indicated many liked the double shift schedule because of the shorter working day and the consequent time flexibility it allowed. These teachers however, also indicated that while a double shift schedule was better for them, they did not think it was better than a single shift for their students.

The TSS was described in Education Week (November 3, 1982), after which many teachers nationwide requested the scale. Their responses to the TSS formed the sample for a national study of teacher stress and job dissatisfaction (Wangberg and Zinkgraf, 1984). Two hundred and sixteen elementary and secondary public school teachers returned completed TSS forms.

This data was factor analyzed, yielding nine factos: burnout/dissatisfaction, work overload, other control, classroom management, physical environment, perfection, work rewards, uptightness, and health habits. A comparison of elementary and secondary subjects indicated three factors which varied significantly. Secondary teachers perceived more stress than elementary teachers concerning burnout/dissatisfaction, classroom management, and work rewards.

What can we conclude from identification of these factors of teacher stress and dissatisfaction? It would appear that the problem has three major components; there are societal, institutional, and personal factors involved. Unfortunately, the solutions will not be simple...we will need to examine ourselves, our school systems and our society.

The following recommendations are offered to improve the teaching workplace and teaching as a profession (Wangberg and Metzger, 1983):

- Improve the public image and recognition of teachers.
- Emphasize positive teacher behaviors and the difference teachers can make.
- Increase parent support of teachers and the schools.
- Improve communication with parents and emphasize the importance of parent involvement in the schools.
- Develop ways to give teachers professional recognition and rewards.
- Increase salary and benefits. Improve retirement plans.
- Provide increased job security and job mobility.
- Provide for increased career advancement opportunities.

- Maintain comfortable temperatures within school buildings during both hot and cold weather.
- Provide clean and pleasant teaching environments.
- Repair old buildings.
- Develop physically safe teaching environments.
- Cut down on paperwork and forms or provide clerical assistance.
- Increase teacher planning time.
- Utilize support groups for teachers to share problems and successes (Wangberg, 1982).
- Provide teachers with adequate materials.
- Improve administrative support for teachers.
- Improve interpersonal relations among teaching staffs.
- Provide teachers with easier access to telephones.
- Increase the possibility for teachers to spend more time in positive contacts with students.
- Utilize "Quality Circles" to improve working conditions (Torrance, 1982).
- Develop--with teachers' input--positive, supportive and ongoing inservice experiences (Levine-Hanes, Wangberg and Yoder, 1982).
- Involve teachers in authentic decision making regarding their teaching.

Unfortunately, solutions to our current educator and educational crisis will not be simple. On the other hand, solutions do not all have to be expensive. While some needed changes (e.g., more pleasant working environments, air conditioning, improved salary and benefits, and clerical aides) will involve expense, others won't. Giving teachers individual recognition for a job well done, involving teachers in decision making concerning their teaching, providing administrative support for teachers, increasing public relations efforts aimed at positive achievements of our teachers and our schools, encouraging professional

support groups, offering stress management workshops and developing at-work exercise programs need not involve great expense.

Increasing educator stress and job dissatisfaction, combined with rival career options, require not only personal stress management programs but also societal and institutional changes aimed at attracting and retaining capable, motivated teachers. Such changes should include the development of programs and policies that will lead to greater public support and respect for educators and improve working conditions and work rewards to make teaching less stressful, more satisfying.

If we do not make such changes in order to prepare and retain quality teachers, our society will suffer. Because teaching is so critical, to both individual and societal welfare, it must be entrusted to talented, well prepared, motivated, and continually satisfied professionals.

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